DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 089 145 CG 008 701

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TITLE Teaching About Women and New Family Styles.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 8p.; National Council on Family Relations Special Emphases, Toronto, 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *College Curriculum; College Instruction; College Students; *Educational Objectives; *Family Life; *Females; *Life Style; Relevance (Education); Role Theory; Social Values; Speeches

ABSTRACT

The author discusses some issues involved in teaching about women and family styles, including the benefits to students and the effectiveness of teachers. The benefits of exposing students to a variety of life styles include: (1) fostering of a greater understanding of diverse human situations and lifestyles; (2) challenging student perceptions and values; (3) heightening the awareness of young women and stimulating them to aspire to greater self-realization and (4) providing a contemporaneity and relevance for youth; (5) encouraging students to assume a life-long, family-cycle, developmental perspective for themselves, and (6) helping to bridge "generation gaps" between instructors and students. Issues relating to teacher effectiveness involve: (1) the teacher's philosophy of education (teaching traditional values vs. exposure to new values); and (2) the teacher's philosophy of family (traditional vs. divergent family styles). The roles of text materials, assignments, lectures, and class experiences in this curriculum are also discussed. (RWP)

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TEACHING ABOUT WOMEN AND NEW FAMILY STYLES

NCFR Special Emphases
Toronto, 1973

Donald P. Irish

NOTE: Since time is very limited, and since there are others who will ably consider the important and voluminous materials concerning the changing status and roles of American women (and men), this panelist will restrict himself to a consideration of "new" family styles and a "future thrust" in teaching marriage and family courses.

Giving one's course a "future thrust" while also exposing students to a variety of extant human life styles may perform a variety of functions.

1) Such emphases can foster a greater understanding (and perhaps tolerance) of diverse human situations and their congruent lifeways.

2) Divergencies from the familiar, accepted, and comfortable patterns should challenge student perceptions and values through the presentation of contrasts and stimuli fostering self re-examination of their beliefs.

3) Consideration of changing sex roles should heighten the awareness of young women and stimulate them to aspire to greater self-realization and autonomy (with concomitant and reciprocal influences on the young men).

4) These themes would provide a contemporaneity and relevance for youth (who will more directly encounter and experience the "future American family forms"), highlighting the implications of current trends when projected into the next generation.

5) A concern for the future in our courses may encourage students to assume a life-long, family-cycle, developmental perspective for themselves, resulting in greater planfulness and more thought given to priorities.

6) Content related to alternative life styles and a "future thrust" should help bridge whatever "generation gap" exists between instructor and students. The older and grayer one is, the greater may be the problem of credibility and rapport.

7) And, of course, such orientations in courses may serve none of these purposes if (a) we are not effective teachers, or if (b) we ourselves are not committed to examine objectively and analytically the present and future options available to us and to the students.

Whether one desires to incorporate such themes in one's courses may greatly depend upon one's own approach to education and on his/her personal "philosophy of the family." Regarding the philosophy of education, does one believe that the paramount function of formal schooling is to reinforce the traditional values and patterns of society exclusively? or does one contend that educational institutions are obligated also to expose youth knowledgeably to a variety of the options chosen and the patterns lived by humankind? Does one wish to maintain the socio-cultural blinders and binders that tend to imprison us all and limit our visions and appreciations? or do we want truly to serve as liberating influences on youth who will live in "the house of tomorrow" which we elders cannot enter, not even in our dreams? Do we intend to guide them to live in a world of stability which will not be? or do we desire to prepare them for adaptability in a world of guaranteed change?

Yet if we opt for the latter alternative approaches, we do a disservice to youth and to education if the challenges thereby provided function only to "undermine their underpinnings" and set them "totally adrift." Substantial and critical new insights and information must be provided; and students need to be encouraged to re-assess (and perhaps somewhat re-arrange) their life values as frameworks in accordance with the new perceptions. Sensitively,

we need to recognize that we should not endeavor to make them "like ourselves." We can give them our love; but we should not impose upon them only our thoughts, for they must develop their own thoughts and patterns appropriate for their world that is to be.

Regarding one's "philosophy of the family," such foci for instruction and learning would be forbidding, threatening, and ineffective, if not impossible, for teachers who are secure only with traditional family forms and who believe that they are best adhered to. Serious and fair consideration of alternative family types and life styles cannot be guided creatively by persons who desire primarily to prolong the past or to perpetuate the present. For example, the movements toward equalitarianism between the sexes and age groups and shifts toward a single standard of ethics cannot be facilitated, nor can the requisite readjustments in socialization processes be fostered, by unsympathetic teachers or inapplicable materials. However, there is no need to view all trends or incipient changes as either desirable or inevitable merely because they are currently manifest. But the young people will need preparation to deal with such profound changes--in order to adapt to them and accept them, if desirable; or to work for alternative solutions if they are seen to threaten or violate basic humanistic values.

Whether one <u>can</u> pursue such themes and explore varied options with youth in marriage and family courses also depends upon the educational setting for the learning. Many public school teachers (primary and secondary) may face difficulties if they were to introduce into the classroom some of the persons or materials suggested below. (One high school teacher in a small town, Minnesota high school recently received chastisement for taking a small group of students from her class to visit a commune, even though she had "cleared" the trip with the administration in advance and had secured signed "permission

slips" from the parents of the students involved. The insights and stimulus gained by the students startled the parents afterward, who then "realized" the import of what they had signed!) Similar problems of "academic freedom" can arise also for faculty persons teaching in the more conservative, sectarian colleges. The suggestions offered herein are appropriate for those who are teaching and learning within private, liberal arts colleges with traditions of academic freedom and for many of those teaching in public colleges and universities with similar qualities.

Text materials-- quite a few texts have included discussions of cross-cultural family types, minority ethnic variations, or historical (or current) utopian "experiments." However, relatively few volumes until recently have presented the variety of contemporary family forms that diverge from the stereotyped "standard package"-- the presumably typical middle-class, two-parent, three-child, a collie-dog plus-a-station-wagon, suburban household. Too often texts have been permeated with such affluent and WASP-ish assumptions. Frequently, inclusions of exotically different patterns were from other cultures or in past times. Extant forms of family life that are "different" have tended to be viewed as "deviants" in a pejorative sense.

Even fewer books have recognized the frequency with which supposedly "atypical" families are to be found within most communities-- even in the same residential blocks with the others. Nor have these so-called "irregular" families been portrayed as ones that are often valid, acceptable, workable, and even satisfying present and future alternatives. There is a need in this heterogeneous world and society to accept considerable diversity as valid, desirable, and even interesting.

Several new "standard texts" and a number of other volumes can contribute materials relevant to these themes. (See bibliography for recent

publications. Among these are volumes by Adams, Bernard, Cox, Eshleman, Fullerton, Geiger, Nye and Berardo, Otto, Queen and Habenstein, Reiss, Scanzoni, and Skolnick and Skolnick).

Lecture content.-- If lectures are presented, they can and should relate our research knowledge to the known family variations. The observed and/or likely consequences for personality outcomes of different patterns of socialization, the effect on power relationships between the sexes and within the family of changed access to resources by individuals, functions performed by variant forms, the values implicit and operative in divergent types, factors leading to stability-instability of relationships, the effects of stigmatization-- all these are among topics appropriate for consideration. A focus on the future (should not) does not reduce a course to mere prognostications; nor does a consideration of variants require the inculcation of their specific value systems. The course materials need to be based on solid research, whatever the thematic emphasis. In any event, predictions of social patterns far beyond the next few years, or attempts to mold students for the year 2000, will probably be dysfunctional. It would be better not to teach young people what they likely will have to "unlearn."

Both textual and lecture content might profitably utilize the individual-developmental and/or family life-cycle approaches, both of which stress changes over time, which require seeing life as a process, a continuum. Just as education and experience with regard to human sexuality is a lifelong affair; so the implications of human mortality needs to be introduced to youth so that from childhood onward they share in "death education." Bradford Smith averred that the attainment of personal maturity by each person requires that he/she "has learned to face the fact of his/her own death and has shaped his/her way of life accordingly." Certainly that involves the development

of a significant orientation to the future within a present context.

In the presentation of past research lore and in the pursuit of new research projects, we need to be aware of the "sexist bias" in much of the accomplished work, in part stemming from the very delineation and definition of the variables themselves, as Elise Boulding has so well illustrated for us. For example, there are categories for "housewife" in the Census, but no equivalent term, "househusband." A "head of the house" is sought, generally assumed to be male. "Dual careers" are recognized for married and employed women but not for men who are of similar statuses. As we speak, so we think. Similarly, there is an "adultomorphic" orientation in virtually all professional research and writing related to the family. A childs-eye view is almost totally ignored. Socialization is a one-way process from parent-to-child, manifesting no recognition that children also socialize their elders--"reverse socialization." The future for family research requires that we revise our terminology and labels, categories and variables, assumptions and consequent conclusions. But our teaching need not await entirely the revisions in research practice and findings.

Assignments.-- Class exercises (or term projects) may be assigned to students which stress issues, movements, and trends that are likely to grow in prominence in the future. For example, they might be asked to devise their own "marriage contract"-- which requires that they think about a "philosophy of marriage and the family" before they marry-- with an accompanying rationale. (A contrasting mood can be engendered by suggesting that they write their own obituary for a death at the age of twenty!) They could be asked to project their most probable personal career and family life patterns for persons of their status and background and goals. They might be assigned

the task of seriously applying the practical implications of ecological requirements to themselves individually and upon their family life style. They might find interesting and useful the delineations of consequences for men and women, adults and children, husbands and wives of a thorough-going extension of equalitarian principles in all realms of life. The women could be stimulated to consider their talents (actualized or potential) and their implications for life goals, sequences, experiences possible. The fairly predictable consequences of achieved "zero population" growth for society might be elaborated. Examining the role of the aged in our present society, students might benefit by considering how they as citizens and persons would wish to see the treatment dealt the aged changed so that conditions might be different when they are 80! Other social problems might be dealt with in a similar fashion when they impinge considerably on family life.

Class experiences, visitors, field trips.-- In a rapidly changing society we are all to some degree "marginal persons," caught between past patterns becoming obsolete and new forms "aborning." Practice with some new behaviors might be achieved in the classroom through role playing-- perhaps through "reverse role-playing" by the two sexes or by the women providing stimulus to the men in the class by playing a fully equalitarian role in group interaction arranged for. The women might be asked to discuss what they wished men might be like in the future, while the men in the class only listened; and then the roles might be reversed. One college faculty couple is talented in presenting for groups a sequence of play excerpts they entitled, "Battle of the Sexes"; and the dramas both enlivened and enlightened.

Finally, significant discussions of new or unusual life patterns can be provoked by special guests invited to class-- or the class may be taken to them or to their institutional milieu-- home for the aged, nursing home, mental hospital, school for the retarded, or other. Persons who are in-

volved in "cluster family" groups, extended families, communes or other types of "intentional communities," inter-racial marriages, inter-racial adoptions, or homosexual pairings could be very helpful. (In many areas of the country there are individual communal groups or larger intentional communities that may be visited not far from campus). Staff persons from Civil Rights Commissions can share lore concerning sex discrimination and changing patterns. Women professionals and men in diverse non-traditional positions can both serve as role models for their own sex and as examples of achievement for the opposite sex as well. Some couples are playing reverse roles in a marriage; while others have worked out an extensive egalitarian agreement; and yet still others share one full position in employment by a firm or institution. Spokes"men" for related "causes" and movements can stimulate discussion and bring greater knowledge of their policies and programs-- Zero Population, Planned Parenthood, "Women's Lib," NOW, Woman's Political Caucus, National Welfare Rights or a "Welfare Mothers" group, Association for Retarded Children, alternative schools, ecology groups, business executives with employment patters that adjust to family needs, and many other possibilities.